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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Radio Service
OFFICE OF INFORMATION

HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT Tuesday, February 15, 1938

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS." Information from the Office of Experiment Stations, United States Department of Agriculture.

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Questions coming in this week are, as usual, many and varied. One listener asks what "energy foods" are. Another inquires about iron in molasses and other sirups. Still another wants to know about vitamins in frozen foods. Then -- but wait. Let's take up these questions and their answers one at a time.

First, to reply to the listener who says she is confused as to just what energy foods are. She says: "So often I hear over the radio or read in magazines about this or that product as a 'good energy food', or a 'good source of energy', especially for children. Just what is an energy food? Is it something that gives special vigor or pep, makes one energetic?"

Answer: That word energy used in connection with foods is very often misunderstood. It happens to be one of the terms the nutritionists used when they first began to classify foods. They put all sugars, starches and fats in the class of energy or fuel foods. Another term is calorie foods. But an energy food wouldn't necessarily make the man who ate it energetic. It would simply supply his machine with fuel or calories. And any surplus energy food his body would probably store as fat.

Here is what a recent bulletin from the Massachusetts Experiment Station has to say about that: (I'm quoting direct.) "The misuse of the term energy is experiencing a wave of popularity among advertisers of cereal, candy and other carbohydrate foods. The Council on Foods of the American Medical Association explain their stand on this question as follows: 'All foods except the simple mineral foods and water contain chemical energy available for use by the healthy body to support the many activities and life processes and, incidentally, to maintain temperature. The use of the term energy in defining caloric energy value of foods should not be confused with the popular usage signifying activity, vitality, strength, vigor or endurance. These conditions depend upon many factors, including freedom from disease, natural constitution, physical environment, training, habits and others. Good nutritional condition, a necessity for health, requires far more than food energy only; all the nutritional essentials of a complete, well-balanced diet, in adequate amounts, are demanded.

"'Food advertising should correctly inform the public of the energy values of foods in carefully chosen terms that may be properly interpreted. The distinction between the caloric and popular senses of the word energy must be recognized and observed.'

"Some perfectly wholesome foods such as cereals have been widely advertised as perfectly balanced or health-giving or energy foods. The criticism of the advertising is not a criticism of the food, but of the misleading and extravagant statements made."

Now to answer the listener who asks about iron (and other valuable minerals) in sirup. She writes: "I have always understood that molasses was one of the good sweets for children, not only because it is a wholesome sweet, but also because it is rich in iron. Lately I have been told that some sirups are far richer in minerals, especially iron and calcium, than others. Will you tell me if this is true and if so, which sirups are better?"

In answer to that question I have another quotation -- this one from last year's report of the Office of Experiment Stations. Here is what that report says: "It used to be thought that sirups and sugars were valuable only for their high energy content. Now some of these products, particularly those prepared in a rather crude way on the farm, are valued as inexpensive sources of minerals, particularly iron and copper. The Mississippi Station has analyzed many samples of sirup, particularly sorgo and sugarcane sirups made on the farms in the State, and a wide variety of commercial sirups, molasses and sugars," and found that "the mineral content of the different types of sirups and sugars" varies greatly. "In general, sorgo sirups may be said to have a high iron and copper content. Sugarcane sirup, especially when concentrated by boiling on an iron pan, as is the custom on the farm, may be an excellent source of iron. Both sorgo and sugarcane sirup contain fair amounts of copper and phosphorus. The mixtures of corn and refiners' sirup may be good sources of iron and copper, depending on the refiners' sirup used. Molasses has a high content, particularly iron and calcium, but as its mineral content increases its palatability decreases."

Interesting, don't you think, that the simple farm methods of boiling down sugarcane and sorghum juice, and the old iron kettle, too, may give the sirup more iron and other valuable minerals than the methods that refine the sirup more? This even holds with brown sugar, for the study shows that brown sugar may contain considerable mineral, especially iron and copper, but as it is purified and becomes lighter in color, the mineral content is less.

Last question. A listener who has been buying frozen vegetables to serve to her family inquires about the vitamins they contain -- wants to know what effect this quick freezing process has on the vitamins in the vegetables.

Workers at the Massachusetts Experiment Station state: "Properly packaged frozen fruits and vegetables show practically no losses in any of the vitamins even after long storage at zero or below." They add "Destruction of vitamin C is very rapid when frozen fruits and vegetables are defrosted in air," but "little loss in vitamin C occurs if solidly frozen vegetables are cooked in boiling water without previous defrosting."

So, if you want to save all possible vitamin C in your frozen vegetables, don't thaw them before cooking. Just drop them frozen solid directly into your kettle of boiling water.

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